to the States/UTs against their demand for the above mentioned period of four months.

Buffer stock of foodgrains in the North-Eastern Region

3413. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the fact that most of the North-Eastern region of the country is inundated by floods every year and no buffer stock of foodgrains is kept to meet the situation leading to unbearable miseries to the people;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) whether Government propose to create and maintain ample buffer stock of foodgrains in the N.E. region.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS (SHRI SATYAPAL SINGH YADAV): (a) to (c) It is a fact that many parts of the North Eastern Region are flood prone areas. In view of this the Government endeavour to create and maintain adequate stock of foodgrains in the North Eastern Region. As on 1st June, 1988 despite various constraints like hilly terrain, law and order sitation, bandhs and landslides there was a stock of 1.67 lakh tonnes of foodgrains including 1.31 lakh tonnes of rice and 36 thousand tonnes of wheat in the Region. Concerted efforts are made to build up a higher level of foodgrains stock, in co-ordination with the Railways and the State Governments concerned.

Skyrocketing prices of essential commodities

3414. SHRI KARNENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the fact that the prices of essential commodities are skyrocketing in the country particularly in Assam, making the life of common man miserable;

(b) if so, whether Government have contemplated any relief measures to give succour to common people; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS (SHRI SATYAPAL SINGH YADAV): (a) Prices of certain essential commodities showed an increase in recent weeks due to decline in production, increase in demand, revision of Minimum Support Prices seasonal factors, transportation bottlenecks and increase in input costs. The increase in prices of essential commodities in Assam is in tune with the general price rise in the country.

(b) and (c) The Government has accorded the highest priority to the control of prices of essential commodities. Apart from certain long term measures to increase the production of essential goods, imports under Open General Licence (OGL), of items which are in short supply like edible oils and pulses are being permitted in order to augment the availability of these items. Recently, the import duty on edible oils has been reduced from 25% to 15%. In order to alleviate problems of high prices of onions in Delhi, action has been taken to distribute onion through public distribution agencies at a subsidised rate of Rs. 10.00 kg. from 14.7.98. Govt. has decided to import 1.5 million tonnes of wheat through State Trading Corporation to augment its availability. Some of the essential commodities like rice, wheat, sugar, imported palmolein and kerosene are also supplied through the Public distribution system and cooperative Stores at below market prices. Stringent actions are being taken against hoarders and black marketeers and others including in unfair trade practices under

the Essential Commodities Act and Prevention of Black Marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essentail Commodities Act etc. by the State/UT Governments. The State Govt. of Assam has also taken steps to control the prices by interaction with the traders, regular reviewing of the stock position and initiating action against black marketeers and hoarders etc.

Theft of Rice from FCI Godown

3415. SHRI RAJ NATH SINGH: Will the Minister of FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that an amount of approximately 15 lakh Tonnes of rice has been stolen from the Food Corporation's Godown last year;

(b) if so, the action taken by Government in this regard and result thereof; and

(c) if no action has been taken, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FOOD AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS (SHRI SATYAPAL SINGH YADAV): (a) An amount of 85.781 MTs of rice worth Rs. 10,60,239.00 was stolen from FCI's godowns during the year 1997-98.

(b) theft cases have been reported to Police Authorities for taking further necessary action. In addition, departmental action has also been initiated against erring officials/officers. Out of total stolen rice, recovery has been made/ordered in respect of rice weighing 76.241 MTs worth Rs. 9,95,646.00. Departmental action has been initiated against 24 FCI personnel. 6 alleged thieves (non-FCI persons) were apprehended by Police in connection with above theft cases.

(c) Does not arise in view of (b) above.

WHO's prediction regarding death of one million women due to T.B.

3416. DR. D. VENKATESHWAR RAO: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the World Health Organisation has predicted that one million women will die of T.B. this year; and

(b) if so, the measures taken in India to control the disease efficiently?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI DALIT EZHILMALAI): (a) and (b) No, Sir. However, to control TB the Government has introduced the Revised National TB Control Programme with World Bank assistacce and the revised strategy will be implemented in 102 districts of the country over the next 3 years, with the objective of achieving a cure rate of 85% in these districts against the national average of 30%.

Functioning of Jipmer Hospital, Pondicherry

3417. SHRI C. P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether he had recently made a surprise visit at JIPMER Hospital, Pondicherry and said that the functioning of the Hospital is alarming and bad;

(b) if so, whether any steps have been taken to improve the functioning of the Hospital;

(c) whether the Committee has appointed to ascertain the functioning of the Hospital, and

(d) if so, whether any report was submitted by the Committees, and any action was taken on that report?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND